

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS SOUTH DAKOTA END OF COURSE PROGRAM

When does a school district need to ask for a waiver from the Department of Education?

A district needs to request a waiver from the Department of Education when that district would like to be excused from following any administrative rule. Most commonly, districts request to be excused from Administrative Rules [24:43:11:01](#) and [24:43:01:01 \(52\)](#). These rules state that high school credit can only be earned in grades 9-12, and also that a unit of credit is earned by 146 hours of seat time, respectively. Many districts like to offer high school credit to students before grade nine for courses such as Algebra I. In this instance, a district would need to ask for a waiver from Administrative Rule 24:43:11:01, which prohibits such credit award.

How does a district request a waiver?

A district can request a waiver by obtaining the applicable [waiver application](#) form as located on the Department of Education website and submitting it to the appropriate staff, as noted on the application.

How long is the waiver valid?

Five years. In the past, districts were asked to file a yearly (annual) report to the Department concerning the status of their waiver. Currently, the Department requires a waiver report from the district only at the end of their 5-year waiver term.

Once the waiver has been approved, what are the district's next steps?

Information regarding process can be found on the end of course exam [flowchart](#), as located on the Department of Education website.

In order to get high school credit for a course taken before grade nine, students not only physically take the class, but must also pass an end of course exam. Why?

After much discussion between the Board of Regents and the Board of Education, the decision to require end of course exams was reached as a mechanism to ensure rigor for those students taking any courses before grade nine.

In addition, State Administrative Rule 24:43:11:01 clearly states that credit for high school must be earned in grades 9-12, so schools that wish to offer high school credit to students before grade nine are asking to be “excused” from a State Rule. This exception is what demands higher accountability.

May districts write their own exam in lieu of using the State exam?

Yes. Districts may choose to write their own exam. If a district would choose to administer a district-created exam, the district would need to create the standards-based exam in alignment with the applicable end of course exam [blueprint](#) and then submit that exam to the Department of Education for approval at least 30 days prior to test administration.

What exams are currently available from the Department of Education?

The Department of Education has worked to create several exams. A list of these exams can be found on the End of Course Exam [website](#).

What resources are available to help the district determine whether they would choose to utilize the State exam or write their own?

The Department of Education has provided several resources to aid a district's decision. An end of course exam blueprint, flowchart, and procedure manual are all available on the Department of Education [website](#).

Can the school district see a copy of State exam prior to deciding whether or not the district would choose to utilize it?

Because the end of course exam is considered “high stakes,” the exam is not released until the security agreement is signed and students are ready to take the exam. However, a district can examine the standards covered and the exam item percentage from reviewing the [exam blueprints](#), as located on the Department of Education website.

Is the State exam based on South Dakota content standards and aligned to the test blueprints?

Yes.

Where is the State exam located?

The exam is currently housed in a program called “Achievement Series” and can be obtained by contacting [Carla Leingang](#) in the Office of Curriculum, Technology, and Assessment.

Does the exam have to be taken on the computer?

No. The district may use a pre-existing State-created exam through the Achievement Series and then print that exam out for paper and pencil administration. The exam would then need to be scored by the local district, based on the answer key provided by the Achievement Series.

If the district opts to utilize the State exam in paper and pencil format, the scored exams must be returned to the Department of Education so that the scores can be entered manually into the Achievement Series database.

Directions for administering the state-created exam using paper/pencil may be found in the [End of Course Procedure Manual](#) located on the DOE website.

Is there a specific window of time in the school year during which the district must administer the exam?

No. However, the district may want to consider their scheduling options in light of the DakotaSTEP testing window. Also, the district would most likely want to consider administering the exam at a time which allows the students to gain as much knowledge as possible while providing a window of time for the student to retake the exam, if applicable.

Also, students must pass the exam for credit before grade nine before the student starts his/her next school year.

Is there a specific amount of physical time that the student has to complete the exam in one sitting?

No. However, the State recommends that the district provide enough time for the student to complete the exam in one sitting.

Can the students use calculators on the exams?

Yes. There will be a list of approved calculators in the End of Course Exam Procedure Manual. The approved calculators will be the same as those that are currently approved for use during the DakotaSTEP.

Are the students allowed to use formula sheets on the exam?

Yes. Formula Sheets for Science, and Geometry are included in the End of Course Procedure Manual. If formula sheets are used for the district-created exam they must be included with the submission of the exam.

When a student takes a course before grade nine and intends to earn high school credit by passing the end of course exam, which grade (course or exam) is recorded on the transcript?

The transcription of grades is a local decision. The State requires that a student pass the end of course exam with at least an 85% proficiency. The local district may decide which grade is transcribed, according to their own local district policy.

If a school district wants to give two separate exams at semester breaks as opposed to administering a true end of course exam, can they do that?

Yes, however, the State has not created end of semester exams. If a district would choose to administer semester exams, the district would need to create the standards-based exam in alignment with the applicable end of course exam [blueprint](#) and then submit that exam to the Department of Education for approval at least 30 days prior to test administration.

More information on this process can be located in the End of Course Exam Procedure Manual.

How many times can an end of course exam be administered?

For the purposes of awarding high school credit to students before grade nine, the exam may be taken up to two times, according to district policy. For the purposes of "testing out" of a credit, the exam may be administered only one time. For both exams, the student must earn at least 85% proficiency to be awarded credit. More information on this and other exam specific questions can be found in the [policy statements](#) on the Department of Education website.

If a student took and passed a course for high school credit before grade nine in a school district that held an approved waiver, can that credit transfer to a district that does not hold such a waiver?

Yes. If the student passed the end of course exam with at least 85% proficiency, that credit can be transferred.

If a student does not pass the end of course exam in order to earn high school credit before grade nine for Algebra I, can the student still go on to the next math course in his/her district?

Yes. This is a local decision. If the student does not pass the end of course exam, it simply means that that course cannot be transcribed. It does not prevent the student from going on to the next math courses.

If a student does not pass the end of course exam in order to earn high school credit before grade nine, can the student then utilize the “test out” waiver to add that course to his/her transcript at a later date?

Yes. If a district holds the appropriate waivers, this is acceptable policy.

Can a district utilize the end of course exams for general diagnostic purposes without having a waiver?

Yes. However, because the end of course exam is considered “high stakes,” the exam is not released until a security agreement is signed and students are ready to take the exam. More information on this diagnostic use can be obtained by contacting [Carla Leingang](#) in the Office of Curriculum, Technology, and Assessment.